

NSC BRIEFING

24 September 1954

SITUATION IN LAOS

I. Assassination of Laotian defense minister and reported resignation of foreign minister foreshadow period of instability in Laos.

A. Defense minister had been advocate of deal with Viet Minh-sponsored dissident leader, but no connection known between killing and views of minister.

B. Killing took place on 18 September in Vientiane at home of foreign minister Phoui Sannanikone, whose offer to resign announced on 21 September.

II. Deal with leader of dissident Pathet Lao government had been official policy of government as determined by prime minister Souvanna Phouma.

A. Meeting took place early in September between premier and Pathet Lao chief Souphanouvong.

B. These two men are half-brothers, members of a junior branch of the Laotian royal family.

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- C. Premier is counting on fact that his half-brother, despite long and close association with Viet Minh, is not known to have become Communist.
- D. Pathet Lao chief gave premier written pledge of loyalty to legal government, reportedly on condition that Laos adopt "neutral" policy, get rid of French personnel and US influence.

III. Premier's contact with Souphanouvong deplored by Crown Prince Savang of senior, reigning branch of royal family.

- A. Savang is real power on Laotian throne, owing to father's poor health and absence in France.
- B. As such he has power to dismiss cabinet and hinted that he would do so as result of Souvanna Phouma's rapprochement policy.
- C. Savang fears rapprochement is Viet Minh trap; says premier too easily influenced by family tie with Pathet Lao leader.
- D. Savang may also fear that premier might bring about defection of Pathet Lao leader from Viet Minh with consequent increase in prestige of rival branch of royal family.